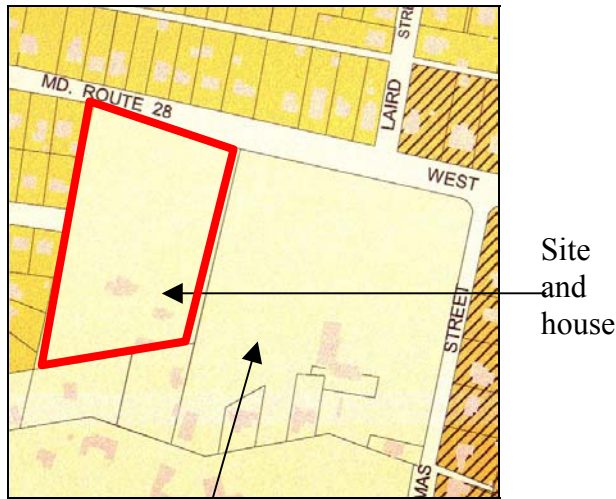


**CITY OF ROCKVILLE HISTORIC DISTRICT COMMISSION
HISTORIC DESIGNATION EVALUATION
STAFF ANALYSIS
For July 16, 2002
MEETING No. 7-02**

SUBJECT: 522 West Montgomery Avenue “Buckingham Property, Thirty Oaks”
MEETING DATE: 6/18/02, continued to 7/16/02
OWNER: Wycliffe L.C. / Elm Street Development



Chestnut Lodge/ Washington Waldorf School

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

Staff recommends that the HDC find the property at 522 West Montgomery Avenue eligible for inclusion in the West Montgomery Avenue Historic District based on its contribution to the agricultural history of Rockville and its association with the two veterinarians that served Rockville in the 20th Century, Dr. Chauncey Grubb and Dr. Richard Buckingham and their families.

BACKGROUND

Notices of the HDC evaluation for significance to the City of Rockville were sent via first class mail to adjacent and confronting property owners, citizen's associations, and other interested parties on June 11, 2002. The agenda for the evaluation meeting was also posted on the city's web page and a sign was posted at the site.

The HDC evaluation was held on June 18, 2002. At the meeting, Planner Christensen stated that this house is to be demolished when the residential development plan is approved. However, it was the subject of a preliminary HDC review in 1998 when it was under contract by CPC Health, Inc. and also planned for demolition in that development. The 1998-1999 reviews were not completed, as the

historic district review was to occur concurrent with the master plan for the overall combined property. The CPC master plan was never submitted due to bankruptcy, and the property was resold.

The house on the property is 88 years old, exceeding the minimum review date of 50 years of age. All properties in the city that are 50 years of age or older must be evaluated for historic, architectural or cultural significance before demolition and appropriate actions taken, according to the City's adopted Environmental Guidelines.

The Maryland Historical Trust Historic Sites Inventory form was researched by consultant Gail Littlefield in 1998 and written by Preservation Planner Judy Christensen in 2002. Ms. Christensen presented a visual tour of the property and the buildings, stating that in 1998, the HDC felt the property possessed enough significance to the City of Rockville to hold a formal evaluation. The property environment is notable for the mature evergreen trees that mark the property boundaries, rolling lawn, and mature trees and shrubs. She noted that a small bridge spans a dry intermittent stream on the property. Although the oldest part of the house is identifiable on the east end of the present structure, as a whole, the house has been modified by many additions that alter the original massing of the house. The house was stuccoed to unify the many exterior finishes and additions over the years. The two-story Veterinary Hospital with attached animal pens and cages was built in 1931 by Dr. Grubb and also falls within the 50-year review period. The other structure on the site is a shed-roofed garage at the rear property line. Its age is undetermined and it is in derelict condition.

Ms. Christensen stated that the property was part of the Julius West farm in the 19th Century and then sold as 29+ acres to John Phillip Mulfinger. Mulfinger sold off portions of the acreage. This parcel was eventually purchased in 1914 by Dr. Chauncey and Emelia Grubb, a veterinarian and his wife, who set up a farm animal practice in Rockville and built the original house around 1914.

Richard Buckingham Sr. was the son of Dr. David Buckingham, the first licensed veterinarian in D.C. Dr. Richard Buckingham followed his father into the field and his father and mother purchased the property at 522 West Montgomery from Dr. Grubb in 1938 for Richard's practice. Dr. Buckingham originally had a large animal (farm) practice, but as farming declined in the area, he turned to small animal practice utilizing the hospital. After the death of his wife, Rose Williams Buckingham, and Dr. Buckingham in 1993, the property was held by his heirs until sold in 2001.

Richard Buckingham, Jr., former owner of the property, testified at the public hearing and contributed to the history of the house and property. He noted that the watercourse was not a stream but a drainage field to the City's storm sewer.

Erica Leatham, an attorney with Holland and Knight representing Elm Street Development, said that Elm Street Development has filed an exploratory application for the PRU development that also includes two lots owned by Mr. Baker and Mr. Yates. She said that a principle element of the plan is to accommodate the natural features of the property. She said that the Mayor and Council suggested preserving the character of the West Montgomery Avenue Historic District during the master plan process and Elm Street Development is committed to that. She stated that Elm Street Development does not oppose historic designation of the three lots that will front West Montgomery Avenue, but does oppose designation of the remainder of the property. She stated that any development on the site would be subject to HDC review anyway because it is contiguous to the West Montgomery Avenue Historic District.

Ms. Leatham said that the existing house does not meet any of the criteria for designation and it is not visible from the public way. Neither it nor Dr. Buckingham is mentioned in Rockville: Portrait of a City, the history of Rockville recently written by Eileen McGuckian. According to Elm Street Development's plan, the house, veterinary hospital and garage will be demolished. The structures on the Baker and Yates properties will be preserved and another lot will be created between them. Ms. Latham said that the PRU process is flexible and creates smaller lots, which leaves more open space. There will be a tree buffer at the Chestnut Lodge property line.

Commissioner Rodgers asked if the veterinary hospital and garage resemble the original structures. Mr. Buckingham stated that the hospital building does but the garage is in very poor condition. He said that his father was approached by the City at one time to include the first 200 feet of the property adjacent to West Montgomery Avenue in the historic district as was done with the Chestnut Lodge property. His father declined at the time because he would not receive any financial compensation as he would with an easement.

Jeff White, a resident of Calvert Road immediately south of the Buckingham property, objected to the trend of huge houses on small lots that have recently been built in the area. He urged the HDC to designate the entire site.

A written summary of the comments presented at the public hearing by Erica Leatham for Elm Street Development were submitted by Ms. Leatham prior to the closing of the record on July 1, 2002. They are attached to the staff analysis. No additional comments were received prior to the closing of the record at the close of business on July 1, 2002.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

Staff recommends that the property at 522 West Montgomery Avenue be found eligible for inclusion in the West Montgomery Avenue Historic District and be recommended to the Mayor and Council for legal designation. The site has historic significance in its reflection of the agrarian history in Rockville. It is associated with two Veterinarians in the 20th Century, Dr. Chauncey Grubb and Dr. Richard Buckingham. The house itself is not a familiar landmark, as it is not visible from the public way. It has been altered by many additions over the years and would be difficult to restore to original condition. It does have significant outbuildings in the 1931 animal hospital and garage, although the shed in particular is in very poor condition.

The original four-acre setting is well preserved. It is the mature trees and environmental setting that constitute a local landmark and visual feature of the neighborhood. The property of record is still a four-acre parcel and must be recommended as a whole. However, three options are available to the Mayor and Council: Designate the entire four acre property, designate the first 200 feet as was done with Chestnut Lodge, or designate only the lots which front upon West Montgomery Avenue.